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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/22/2016
TAGS: PGOV KDEM KPKO MOPS CG
SUBJECT: ITURI UPDATE: FARDC-MONUC OPERATION RETAKES
CONTROL OF TCHEI

REF: A. KINSHASA 631

1B. KINSHASA 359

Classified By: PolOff CBrown, reasons 1.4 b/d.

11. (C) Elements of the Armed Forces of the DRC (FARDC), backed by MONUC peacekeepers, retook control of the Ituri town of Tcheli (approximately 43 miles south of Bunia) May 21 during Operation Ituri Explorer. The operation, which was launched May 20 and included some 3,000 FARDC troops and 1,000 MONUC peacekeepers (from the Pakistani, Bangladeshi and South African battalions), aimed at capturing or eliminating militia forces with the Congolese Revolutionary Movement (MRC) and the Patriotic Front for Resistance in Ituri (FRPI). The FARDC and MONUC had attempted to seize control of Tcheli in February, but those efforts were stymied following the mutiny of some FARDC commandos (ref B).

12. (C) Major Gazali, the MONUC Ituri Brigade Intelligence Chief, said the militia presented heavy resistance in intense fighting during heavy rains. According to Gazali, more than 40 militia were reportedly killed in the operation; 5 FARDC were killed and 13 others were wounded in action. FARDC spokesman Captain Olivier Mputu said the FARDC now controls the areas around Tcheli, Bunga, Tchekele and Aveba in Irumu territory. Gazali said follow-up operations will be conducted May 21 to further expand FARDC control of the region.

13. (C) MONUC Ituri Brigade Commander General Mahboob Haider Khan called the opening battles of Ituri Explorer "major military and psychological victories." In addition to the large number of militia reportedly killed, General Mahboob said the FARDC recovered 13 AK-47 rifles and six mortar launchers. General Mahboob also said Ituri Explorer had been the largest UN military offensive ever conducted.

14. (C) Comment: The capture of Tcheli, a major militia base in southern Ituri, will provide a significant boost to further anti-militia operations in the region. While a militia threat still exists to the south of Bunia in Irumu territory, the FARDC now needs to carry their momentum forward by launching offensives to the north in Mahagi territory and eliminating the forces of Peter Karim and the MRC. End comment.

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